

Gray discovered the Great River

For nearly 200 years explorers for England and Spain mentioned seeing a large bay at the entrance of a large river on the Washington and Oregon coast. But it was in 1792, that an American finally entered the rough mouth of the river.

Capt. Robert Gray left Boston Harbor in 1791, on his second trading trip to the Pacific Northwest in command of Columbia Rediviva, with Capt. John Kendrick in command of the Lady Washington.

For their second trip to the Northwest, the two had changed vessels to command. The trip was to include trading with the Native Americans six to eight months and proceed to China to trade the furs for tea and silk.

It was during this trip that Gray came upon the entrance to the Columbia River but the current was too strong for him to enter, so he sailed further north.

While trading and exploring the north, Gray met Capt. George Vancouver in April 1872.

Vancouver had been sent by Great Britain to examine the coast line and try to locate any upriver or inter ocean channels. Vancouver was commanding the war sloop Discovery and was accompanied by the armed tender Chatham, commanded by Lieutenant William R. Broughton.

Gray shared with Vancouver his discovery and attempt to enter the mouth of the rough Columbia River and gave Vancouver a summary of his log over a portion of the

last several months.

Prior to running into Gray, Vancouver had noticed the mouth of the Columbia River but had decided it was Cape Disappointment and Deception Bay and passed by it. At the time, Vancouver concentrated on the Straits of Fuca and surrounding waterways.

Upon leaving Vancouver, Gray began traveling south and found himself at the mouth of the Columbia River once again on May 10, 1792. The next day, May 11, Gray set full sail ahead, crossed the sand bar at the mouth of the river and entered the Columbia River, which he named after his ship.

He found himself 20 miles from the Pacific Ocean in the middle of a large freshwater river.

During his time on the Columbia, Gray traded with the Native Americans along the banks of the river.

On the following day, May 12, he moved upstream about 15 miles. Realizing he was out of the main channel, he returned to the ocean.

On May 20, after leaving the Columbia River, Gray met Vancouver again on the ocean and told him of his discovery.